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## **AN ATHEIST VISITS HEAVEN**

*by Nancy Rynes*



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"Most people die from injuries like yours," my trauma surgeon insisted. His somber face reinforced the gravity of my condition, as I lay in the ICU, unable to walk after a serious bicycling accident.

He was right. A forty-six-year-old cyclist run down by a texting driver usually doesn't survive the initial impact. By a miraculous series of events, I managed to make it through the crash but came away with injuries that would require more intervention. Death came knocking three days later as a surgical team worked to repair my shattered spine. Being relatively young and healthy, my dying on the operating table had seemed like a remote possibility.

Before this accident, my life seemed pretty well set. I had a degree in the physical sciences and worked as a science and technology writer. Divorced with one child and no belief in a higher power, I felt terrified of death yet too scared to take chances to truly live. While not the kind of atheist who outwardly confronted those spiritually minded people in my life, inwardly I suspected they succumbed to delusional thinking.

That relatively routine surgery to repair my spine brought my death and with it the realization that I had been the delusional one all along.

The first glimmer that something happened in the operating room came when I awoke in the middle of a lovely meadow overlooking a low range of sparkling mountains. Impossibly beautiful mountains rose against a silvery sky. Colors unlike anything on Earth met my sight, and a sense of peace, love, and beauty that defied human language grabbed my heart.

For the first time ever in my life, I felt totally calm, completely accepted, and miraculously whole. A deep, profound sense of love permeated everything there, including me. This love seemed huge, as if the structure of this place was somehow made from it.

Soon after arriving, I wondered if I had died in surgery and if I had, why was I here? Shouldn't I be burning in the hell I had been taught about as a child?

Someone answered with a booming voice that I heard not with my ears but rather sensed with the entire core of my being, "You are my child. This is your home. Welcome home." With that voice came more love than one human could ever imagine. It held me in an embrace so buoyant I felt as if I floated among the clouds. This was a Divine voice and a Divine love that absolutely and unconditionally welcomed me back to my true home

During what seemed like a summer semester at university, Heaven taught me a lifetime's worth of knowledge about the spiritual realm and life on Earth. The most important thing I took away from that event was that Divine love and compassion formed the core everything. It binds all matter, energy, and consciousness together. Divine love is *real*. Divine consciousness is *real*. The afterlife is *real*. We all exist as integral parts of this "field" of Divine love.

Eventually, Heaven gave me the opportunity to return to Earth to make my human life into one of more love and inner peace than at any other time in my life. Atheism no longer suits me, and my fear of death evaporated. The best part of my experience is that I feel more present, centered, joyful, and calm than I could ever have imagined.